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Human resources management

Study on the availability of skills in local labour markets for which international recruitment for the General Service category takes place

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 59/266, requested the Secretary-General to conduct a study on the availability of skills in local labour markets for which international recruitment for General Service staff takes place and, drawing on the findings, to reassess the determination made in 1975 that recruitment from outside the area of the duty station is necessary to staff the text-processing units, bearing in mind the need for the highest standards of quality relevant to the language function, and to report to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

In response to that request, the Office of Human Resources Management, in cooperation with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, conducted such a study, taking into account a number of recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in its report on the same subject (A/59/388), including conducting a targeted recruitment campaign and systematic testing of local candidates.

The present report has been prepared on the basis of that study. It provides background information, including a summary of skills required, describes the outreach efforts made to attract applications from local labour markets, and analyses the results of the recruitment campaign.

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The study, conducted within existing resources, reconfirms the availability of qualified candidates from the local market for the English Text Processing Unit, but could not conclusively determine if qualified candidates for the text processing units of the other five official languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish) were available locally in sufficient numbers to meet the staffing needs of the Secretariat.

The General Assembly may wish to provide guidance on whether further study should be made to determine conclusively if recruitment from outside the area of the duty station is necessary to meet the staffing needs of the Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish Text Processing Units. Should the General Assembly decide that such studies should be made, additional resources would be required, as indicated in the OIOS report (see A/59/388, paras. 42 and 44).

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I. Introduction

Background

1. The present study has been prepared in response to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 59/266, to conduct a study on the availability of skills in local labour markets for which international recruitment takes place for the General Service category. The request was made after the General Assembly considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the same subject (A/59/388), in which OIOS recommended greater efforts to identify suitable candidates in the local labour market through targeted recruitment campaigns and testing of candidates.

2. As noted by the OIOS report, there were two assessments made in the past regarding the availability of skills in local labour markets. The original determination in 1975 was based on the results of tests given by the Recruitment Division in the 1960s and early 1970s. As pointed out in the OIOS report, with changes in the conditions of local labour markets, the data derived 30 years ago may be obsolete and may need to be updated. In 2000, when the local salary survey took place for the General Service and related categories in New York, an informal survey of the comparator employers was made in an attempt to see if the jobs comparable with posts in the text processing units could be found among the comparators. The findings were negative. The OIOS report pointed out that the findings did not necessarily establish that qualified people are not available in local markets, and called for strategic outreach efforts to identify skills in local labour markets.

3. The present study takes into account the recommendations made in the OIOS report within existing resources, including strategic outreach efforts such as advertising vacancy announcements in locally, regionally and nationally circulated newspapers in the relevant languages, cooperation with language departments of United States universities and training institutes that specialize in foreign languages.

4. Some of the recommendations in the OIOS report, such as the use of recruitment agencies and local foreign language associations and the establishment of a trainee programme, have not been implemented yet due to lack of time and resources required to identify suitable recruitment agencies on a basis of competitive bidding and to establish the proposed training programme within the time frame.

5. The study provides a summary of the skills required, describes the various outreach efforts made to attract applications and presents the test results of eligible candidates.

6. The present study, based on the results of the recruitment campaign, provides useful preliminary information on the availability of skills in local labour markets for which international recruitment takes place for the General Service category. Should the Assembly require more comprehensive data, it may wish to consider requesting further recruitment campaigns with additional resources.

II. Scope of the study

7. For the practical purpose of identifying and testing candidates readily available in the local labour market, the recruitment campaign focused mainly on candidates who indicated their current address was in the New York metropolitan area, regardless of their legal status in the United States.

A. Projected requirements for Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants

8. According to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the projected number of General Service vacancies in the Text Processing Section from 2005 to 2009 is 47, as shown in table 1. The largest requirement is in the Arabic Text Processing Unit, where 19 posts are expected to become vacant in the next five years.

Table 1
Current and projected vacancies in text processing units

	Current vacancies[a]	*Projected vacancies 2005*	*Projected vacancies 2006*	*Projected vacancies 2007*	*Projected vacancies 2008*	*Projected vacancies 2009*	***Total***
Arabic Text Processing Unit	6	1	7	3	1	1	**19**
Chinese Text Processing Unit	0	0	4	2	1	—	**7**
English Text Processing Unit	2	0	—	1	—	1	**4**
French Text Processing Unit	0	1	—	1	1	1	**4**
Russian Text Processing Unit	0	—	4	—	1	—	**5**
Spanish Text Processing Unit	0	1	1	4	2	—	**8**
Total	**8**	**3**	**16**	**11**	**6**	**3**	**47**

Source: Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, as at 31 July 2005.
[a] Current vacancies are filled by retirees.

9. In addition, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management requires temporary staffing in order to meet increased demand during peak periods, and to meet other needs such as replacement of staff on mission detail, maternity leave or sick leave. For example, a total of 21 Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants were recruited on a temporary basis during the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly in 2004. These and other temporary requirements are normally met by hiring from the pool of retired/former staff members who do not receive international benefits.

10. Of the 47 projected vacancies, four are in the English Text Processing Unit, where Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants are recruited locally. Thus, the task of the present study is to determine whether the local labour market will be able to meet the requirements for the remaining 43 projected vacancies of Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants in other units over the next five-year period.

B. Desirable size of the roster of candidates

11. In building a viable roster of qualified candidates, various contingencies must be considered. For example, while the projected staffing requirements of the Text Processing Section cover the next five years, past experience shows that many successful candidates placed on the roster move on to new jobs and become unavailable. In addition, the projected staffing requirements do not take into account attrition due to reasons other than retirement. Furthermore, not all the candidates from the roster may be found suitable when interviewed by programme managers. In view of the above, it is prudent to provide for a margin of safety by ensuring that the size of the roster is at least 50 per cent greater than the projected staffing requirements. Thus, in order to meet the staffing requirements of the Text Processing Section with skills available in local markets, we would need to build and maintain a roster with a total of 72 candidates, as shown in table 2.

Table 2
Desirable size of roster of Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants

Language	*Current and projected vacancies 2005-2009*	*Desirable size of roster*
Arabic	19	29
Chinese	7	11
English	4	6
French	4	6
Russian	5	8
Spanish	8	12
Total	**47**	**72**

III. Skills required

12. According to the vacancy announcement used by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the functions of Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants are as follows:

(a) Produce camera-ready documents for reproduction by formatting documents in desktop publishing layout; this includes data input from audio or live dictation. Incorporate changes as marked by editors, translators and revisers, ensuring that the final version of the document conforms to, as the case may be, (a) the draft translation, as to contents; and/or (b) the original language manuscript, as to format and typography, in accordance with existing editorial guidelines;

(b) Perform proofreading functions, ensuring that changes have been incorporated as marked in the draft copy and alerting the responsible authority if obvious errors or discrepancies are found in the translated text;

(c) Participate, as a member of a team, in the production of parliamentary and miscellaneous documentation, supplements and sales publications by preparing desktop publishing layout of the final product in the relevant language for reproduction in hard copy and electronic dissemination;

(d) Compile submitted corrections and edit documents in the relevant language, according to required format;

(e) Perform other related work as required.

13. The key job requirements of Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants are as follows:

(a) Education: high school diploma or equivalent;

(b) Passing the following qualifying tests:

- Typing test (54 words per minute)
- Grammar test and spelling test
- Document dictation (verbatim) test
- Text-formatting test

(c) Experience: progressively responsible experience with the methods and procedures for desktop publishing documentation (draft typing, copy editing, proofreading and typographical layout of documentation);

(d) Languages: must have the relevant language as the primary language (usually mother tongue); oral and written proficiency in that language, with strong knowledge of spelling and grammar. For non-English posts, the ability to communicate in English is desirable, the posts being in New York;

(e) Other skills: familiarity with the documents production system;

(f) Other requirements: necessity to rotate in day and night shifts, and availability for overtime and on-call assignments, depending on the needs of the service.

IV. Recruitment campaign

14. Following the recommendations of the OIOS report, a targeted recruitment campaign was launched jointly by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Office of Human Resources Management in 2005 to determine the availability of the required skills in the local labour market and to build the roster of qualified candidates for the anticipated vacancies in text processing units.

15. A number of methods were employed to seek potential candidates, including advertising vacancy announcements on the United Nations web site (www.jobs.un.org) and in English and foreign language newspapers, and soliciting

applications from language departments of universities, language-training institutes, spouses of staff members and permanent missions to the United Nations.

16. Following is a summary of the outreach efforts that have been made:

(a) On 8 and 9 March 2005, vacancy announcements reflecting the job requirements as outlined in paragraph 12 above were posted on the United Nations employment website (www.jobs.un.org);

(b) On 29 and 30 March 2005, e-mail messages were sent to language departments of universities and language-training institutes in the United States, requesting assistance to circulate vacancy announcements on their campuses and in their facilities;

(c) On 22 April 2005, an e-mail message was broadcast to the staff members of the Secretariat and United Nations programmes and agencies in New York and to permanent missions to the United Nations in New York;

(d) A note verbale dated 29 April 2005 was sent to all permanent missions to the United Nations in New York informing of the vacancy announcements;

(e) Advertisements were placed in various English and foreign-language newspapers circulated in the United States as follows:

- Arabic:
  - *Al-Ahram International* on 6 May 2005, with a circulation of 45,000 copies
  - *Al-Asboa* on 27 May 2005, with a circulation of 25,000 copies
- Chinese:
  - *World Journal* on 1 and 2 May 2005, with a circulation of 180,000 copies
- English:
  - *The New York Times* on 1 May 2005, with a circulation of 1.14 million copies on Sundays
- French:
  - *The Haitian Times* on 4 May 2005, with a total circulation of 15,000 copies (10,000 copies in the New York metropolitan area and 5,000 copies in the rest of the United States)
  - *France-Amerique* on 4 May 2005, with a circulation of 20,000 copies
- Spanish:
  - *El Diario* on 3 and 4 May 2005, with a circulation of 50,000 copies
- Russian:
  - *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* on 30 April 2005, with a circulation of 40,000 copies

V. Analysis of the results of the recruitment campaign

A. Applications received and status of review and testing

17. In response to the recruitment campaign, 1,303 applications were received as at 29 July 2005, with a breakdown of 166 for Arabic positions, 119 for Chinese positions, 519 for English positions, 166 for French positions, 106 for Russian positions and 227 for Spanish positions. Table 3 gives the summary status of applications as at 29 July 2005.

Table 3
Status of recruitment campaign as at 29 July 2005

Language	*Total applications*	*Local*	*Local not eligible*	*Eligible local*	*Convoked local*[a]	*Scheduled local*	*Tested*	*Passed*	*Failed*	*Success rate of tested*
Arabic	166	66	5	61	61	51	47	3	44	6.38%
Chinese	119	97	4	93	93	76	40	10	30	25.00%
English	519	265	27	238[b]	77	50	46	14	32	30.43%
French	166	74	14	60	60	49	44	5	39	11.36%
Russian	106	54	5	49	49	35	21	0	21	0.00%
Spanish	227	109	11	98	98	83	47	8	39	17.02%
Total	**1 303**	**665**	**66**	**599**	**438**	**344**	**245**	**40**	**205**	**16.33%**

Source: Office of Human Resources Management.

[a] Candidates invited to take the tests are mainly those who have their current address in the New York metropolitan area.

[b] Includes 161 applicants not invited due to late application but reserved for future recruitment campaigns.

1. Arabic

18. One hundred sixty-six applications were received in response to the vacancy announcement; 66 candidates had their current address in the New York metropolitan area; 51 candidates were scheduled to take the test and 47 candidates took it. Of the 47 candidates tested, three candidates passed the test. That represents a 6.38 per cent success rate for those tested. Of the three successful candidates, one has United States citizenship, one has permanent resident status and the remaining one has a type of visa that would require conversion to a G-4 visa if recruited. Thus, only two candidates would be eligible for local recruitment, which would be insufficient to meet the projected needs. Since the Arabic Text Processing Unit has 19 projected vacancies in the next five years, the desirable size of the roster for Arabic would be 29 (19 plus 50 per cent) (see para. 11 and table 2).

2. Chinese

19. One hundred nineteen candidates responded to the advertised vacancy announcement; 97 candidates had their current address in the New York metropolitan area; 76 candidates were scheduled to take the test and 40 actually took it. Of the 40 candidates tested, 10 passed the test. That represents a 25 per cent success rate among those tested. Of the 10 successful candidates, one has United States citizenship, two have United States permanent resident status, two have a G-4

visa, one is applying for United States permanent resident status and four have other types of visas that would require conversion to a G-4 visa if recruited. Therefore, of the 10 successful candidates, three would qualify for local recruitment, which would be insufficient to meet the projected needs (see para. 11 and table 2).

3. English

20. Although English Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants are recruited locally, the recruitment campaign included English positions to build a roster for recruitment purposes and to reassess the local market condition.

21. The vacancy announcement for English positions attracted 519 applications, which represent 39.65 per cent of applications received for all languages. 265 applications (51.06 per cent) had indicated their current address in the New York metropolitan area; 50 candidates were scheduled to take the test and 46 took it. Fourteen candidates were successful and 32 failed; 30.43 per cent of the candidates tested passed the test. Of the 14 successful candidates, 10 are United States citizens, and two are United States permanent residents, making a total of 12 candidates eligible for local recruitment. Since there are four projected vacancies in the English Text Processing Unit for the next five years and the desirable size of the English roster is six, there is a surplus of six candidates. Thus, the local labour market is expected to continue to meet the staffing needs of the Secretariat.

4. French

22. The vacancy announcement attracted 166 applications for the French Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants positions. Seventy-four candidates had their current address in the New York metropolitan area; 49 were scheduled to take the test and 44 actually took it. Five candidates were successful and 39 failed; 11.36 per cent of the candidates tested passed the test. Of the five successful candidates, none has United States citizenship and one has United States permanent residency status. The remaining three have other types of visas that would require conversion to a G-4 visa if recruited. Thus, of the five successful candidates, only one will qualify for local recruitment, which would be insufficient to meet the projected needs. Since the French Text Processing Unit has four projected vacancies to be filled in the next five years, the desirable size of the French roster would be six.

5. Russian

23. One hundred six candidates responded to the vacancy announcement. Of those, 54 had their current address in the New York metropolitan area; 35 were scheduled to take the test, and 21 took it. None passed the exam. The Russian Text Processing Unit has five projected vacancies to be filled in the next five years. The desirable size of the Russian roster is eight. The recruitment campaign indicates difficulty in meeting staffing needs through local recruitment.

6. Spanish

24. Two hundred twenty-seven candidates responded to the vacancy announcement for Spanish Editorial and Desktop Publishing Assistants; 109 had their current address in the New York metropolitan area; 83 were scheduled to take the test and 47 actually took it. Eight candidates were successful and 39 failed; 17.02 per cent of those tested passed the test. Of the eight successful candidates, two are United

States citizens, and three have United States permanent residency status. The other three candidates have other types of visas that would require conversion to a G-4 visa if recruited. Thus, of the eight successful candidates, five candidates would be eligible for local recruitment, which would be insufficient to meet the projected needs. Since there are eight projected vacancies to be filled in the Spanish Text Processing Unit in the next five years, the desirable size of the Spanish roster would be 12.

B. Summary of findings

25. Table 4 summarizes the preliminary findings of the recruitment campaign.

Table 4
Preliminary results of the 2005 recruitment campaign versus projected staffing needs and desirable size of roster candidates

Language	*Number of candidates tested*	*Number of total successful candidates*	*Number of successful candidates eligible for local recruitment*	*Successful candidates eligible for local recruitment as per cent of those tested*	*Projected staffing needs for 2005-2009*	*Desirable size of roster of local candidates*	*Number of additional local candidates required*
Arabic	47	3	2	4.26%	19	29	27
Chinese	40	10	3	7.50%	7	11	8
English	46	14	12	26.09%	4	6	-6[a]
French	44	5	1	2.27%	4	6	5
Russian	21	0	0	0.00%	5	8	8
Spanish	47	8	5	10.64%	8	12	7
Total	**245**	**40**	**23**	**9.39%**	**47**	**72**	**49**[b]

[a] "-6" indicates that the number of successful candidates eligible for local recruitment is in excess of the required size of the roster by 6, as explained in paragraph 21.

[b] Total number of additional local candidates required for non-English official United Nations languages is 55.

VI. Conclusion

26. The findings of the 2005 recruitment campaign reconfirm the availability of a sufficient number of qualified candidates from the local labour market to meet the staffing needs of the English Text Processing Unit. For the other languages, with the exception of Russian, the 2005 campaign indicates that it is possible to identify some qualified candidates locally, but not in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

VII. Recommendation

27. **The General Assembly may wish to take note of the present report and to provide guidance on whether further study should be made to determine conclusively if recruitment from outside the area of the duty station is necessary to meet the staffing needs of the Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish text processing units.**

28. **Should the General Assembly decide that further study should be undertaken, additional resources would be required, as indicated in the OIOS report (see A/59/388, paras. 42 and 44).**